

Frequently Asked Questions Community Planning & Investment Program FY 2005 Grant Program

We encourage you to read through all the frequently asked questions below, as some are interrelated and together may fully clarify the issue in question.

1. [Has the current state budget situation had a bearing on this grant round?](#)

2. [How can a municipality tell whether it is eligible for a Comprehensive Planning Grant or a Comprehensive Plan Update Grant?](#)

3. [Can a municipality that has an inconsistent comprehensive plan apply for a Comprehensive Plan Update Grant?](#)

4. [Can a municipality that is now working on a comprehensive plan apply for an Implementation Grant?](#)

4B. [To be eligible for an Implementation Grant, a municipality must have an adopted comprehensive plan that has been found to be consistent with the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act. Our municipality's comprehensive plan has been found to be consistent with the Act, but the public hearing to vote on its adoption is scheduled to take place after the due date for grant applications. Can we apply for an Implementation Grant before knowing if the town successfully votes to adopt the plan?](#)

5. [Can a municipality submit applications for more than one grant?](#)

6. [Would a multimunicipal partnership applying for a Comprehensive Planning Grant have a competitive advantage?](#)

7. [What requirements and review criteria does SPO apply to a proposal's strategy for providing matching funds?](#)

8. [What costs are eligible to be funded under these programs?](#)

9. [Can expenses already incurred on the project prior to the grant award be covered under the grant?](#)

10. [Would requesting a lower grant award give our municipality's grant proposal a competitive advantage compared to higher requests?](#)

11. [What does the future hold for SPO's grant program?](#)

12. Regional Challenge Grants: We have a regional project in mind, but we are not clear about whether SPO would view it favorably and how to apply.

13. Regional Challenge Grants: Can money received from other funding sources be used to fulfill the 100% cash match requirement?

14. Regional Challenge Grants: Can expenses already incurred on the project prior to the grant award be covered under the grant?

15. Regional Challenge Grants: In outlining the project and workplan, does the involvement of all project partners need to be described?

16. Please explain the requirement in the FY 2004 Implementation Grant program that allows only for the preparation of zoning ordinances in light of the following legislative purposes and financial assistance criteria directions.

Title 30-A §4312. 2 states that the legislative purpose of the growth management act is to B - "Encourage municipalities to identify the tools and resources to effectively plan for and manage future development within their jurisdictions with a maximum of local initiative and flexibility" and C – Encourage local land use ordinances, tools and policies based on local comprehensive plans"

Title 30-A §4346 further states that in making grants pursuant to the technical and financial assistance program the State Planning Office "shall consider the need for planning in a municipality or multimunicipal region, the proximity of the municipality or multimunicipal region to the other areas that are conducting or have completed the planning process and the economic and geographic role of the municipality or multimunicipal region within a regional context. The office may consider other criteria in making grants, as long as the criteria support the goal of encouraging and facilitating the adoption and implementation of local and multimunicipal growth management programs consistent with the provisions of this article."

*

*

*

1. Has the current state budget situation had a bearing on this grant round?

Yes. Although this grant round factored in current budget constraints as of the end of January 2005, there is no guarantee that budget cuts will not be forthcoming. Budgetary actions of the Administration and Legislature could potentially impact funding of the grant program for this and future grant rounds. Unfortunately, such uncertainty may factor into a municipality's decision about whether or not to dedicate the time and effort involved in applying for these funds. It is SPO's sincere hope to offer the grant programs at the anticipated levels. However, we feel compelled to remind municipalities, as they consider the time and effort involved in applying for these funds, that there is an element of risk and uncertainty that has not necessarily been a factor in previous grant rounds.

2. How can a municipality tell whether it is eligible for a Comprehensive Planning Grant or a Comprehensive Plan Update Grant?

Municipalities that have not received a [Comprehensive Planning Grant](#) from the State are eligible for a Comprehensive Planning Grant, regardless of whether they will be updating an existing plan or developing a plan for the first time. Municipalities eligible to apply for a one-time Comprehensive Planning Grant are listed in Appendix E. Municipalities that **have** already received a Comprehensive Planning Grant from the State that was encumbered prior to July 1, 1996 are eligible to apply for an [Update Grant](#).

3. Can a municipality that has an inconsistent comprehensive plan apply for a Comprehensive Plan Update Grant?

Yes, but municipalities that have consistent plans will have an advantage. The program statement for this grant program provides additional background on the rationale for this approach. Competition for [Update Grants](#) is intense, and decreased funding means fewer awards program-wide.

Proposals from municipalities with inconsistent plans can be competitive, but only if they seriously address the issues raised in the update need assessment and narrative components of the application. Increasing the local match above the required amount is one way that municipalities can boost their scores.

4. Can a municipality that is now working on a comprehensive plan apply for an Implementation Grant?

If the municipality already has an adopted comprehensive plan that has been determined to be consistent with the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, the answer is "yes." (If you are unsure of your town's status, please consult the [list of towns whose plans have been found consistent by SPO](#).) But if the municipality is in the process of updating or revising its plan, SPO will consider how this affects the readiness of the municipality to embark on an implementation project.

If the municipality is now working on a plan, but has yet to submit the new or revised plan to SPO for review, the answer is generally "no," given the time it normally takes for a review to be conducted. See Question 5 below.

4B. To be eligible for an Implementation Grant, a municipality must have an adopted comprehensive plan that has been found to be consistent with the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act. Our municipality's comprehensive plan has been found to be consistent

with the Act, but the public hearing to vote on its adoption is scheduled to take place after the due date for grant applications. Can we apply for an Implementation Grant before knowing if the town successfully votes to adopt the plan?

Yes, a municipality whose comprehensive plan has been found to be consistent with the Act but that will not know if the plan has been successfully adopted until after the due date for grant applications may apply for an Implementation Grant with the understanding that any award will be withdrawn if the plan is not adopted by June 30, 2005.

5. Can a municipality submit applications for more than one grant?

Apart from the specifics of question #4, yes, if the eligibility requirements for each grant can be met. It is important to bear in mind, however, that readiness to conduct a planning/implementation project is a consideration under the scoring criteria for most of the grants, and it may be difficult for a municipality to show that the timing is right and resources are available to embark on simultaneous projects and to complete them in timely fashion.

6. Would a multimunicipal partnership applying for a Comprehensive Planning Grant have a competitive advantage?

Multimunicipal or regional solutions to address sprawl-related issues and regional duplication of services, or that engender more effective and efficient public investment, are considered to be a smart growth approach consistent with state goals outlined in the [Planning and Land Use Regulation Act](#). (For a discussion of smart growth principles, please refer to the "Smart Growth vs. Sprawl" narrative on Page 3 of the [Introduction to Community Planning & Investment Grants](#).) Multimunicipal proposals intending to pursue such an approach would be awarded bonus points (See the **Scoring** section in the program statement of each competitive grant).

7. What requirements and review criteria does SPO apply to a proposal's strategy for providing matching funds?

SPO draws a distinction between the minimum local match required for each respective grant and the leveraging of funds beyond that amount.

Though SPO allows the use of municipal staff resources and other "in-kind" services to meet the minimum matching requirement for its [Comprehensive Planning Grants](#) and [Implementation Grants](#), SPO looks closely at the "quality" of the matching component, and gives added consideration to municipalities that commit to raising additional funds for the project, as opposed to assigning time from already funded positions. The raising of new funds at Town Meeting or Council Meeting also provides a clear indication that the municipality is truly behind the project in question.

For the highly-competitive [Comprehensive Plan Update Grants](#), the approach to meeting the local match requirement will be given a particularly hard look.

Beyond meeting the minimum local match requirement per grant program, SPO's view regarding additional leveraging – be it extra dollars, commitments from existing staffing or other in-kind services – is the more the better. This is the area in which applicants should take full advantage of creative grantsmanship in demonstrating how a grant award will be supported and in turn support other resources.

8. What costs are eligible to be funded under these programs?

The program statements provide clear guidance on this question. Eligible expenses are costs directly attributable to the development and adoption of plans and implementation strategies. The grants are not intended to finance the ongoing operation of planning activities, and, therefore, recurring operational or maintenance costs are not eligible.

9. Can expenses already incurred on the project prior to the grant award be covered under the grant?

In general, state funds should be used to cover eligible costs incurred after grant encumbrance.

For [Comprehensive Planning Grants](#) and [Implementation Grants](#), eligible expenses incurred prior to the grant award may be applied to the local match or may be eligible for reimbursement from the state grant, if approved in writing by SPO.

For [Comprehensive Plan Update Grants](#) and [Regional Challenge Grants](#), eligible expenses incurred prior to the grant award, but after January 1, 2005 may be applied to the local match, if approved in writing by SPO. Only eligible expenses incurred after grant award are eligible for state reimbursement.

10. Would requesting a lower grant award give our municipality's grant proposal a competitive advantage compared to higher requests?

Grant requests should be based upon the budget necessary to complete the project as proposed, as well as on the ability to meet the local match obligation. SPO carefully follows the scoring guidelines and considerations outlined in each program statement.

11. What does the future hold for SPO's grant program?

Until we have a better idea of the funding picture for FY 2005, it would be premature to speculate about future grant rounds. However, SPO fully intends to offer a subsequent round in spring 2006. Realizing that municipalities need a significant amount of lead time to begin preparing for a planning or implementation project, SPO will endeavor to inform municipalities about upcoming grant opportunities as soon as is possible.

12. Regional Challenge Grants: We have a regional project in mind, but we are not clear about whether SPO would view it favorably and how to apply.

Please contact Fred Landa at SPO at 287-3860 or fred.landa@maine.gov to discuss the nature of the project and for information on how to apply.

13. Regional Challenge Grants: Can money received from other funding sources be used to fulfill the 100% cash match requirement?

The applicant and project partners provide the 100% cash match, which brings stakeholder constituents to the table and enhances the opportunity for the success of the project. Funds leveraged from outside sources beyond stakeholder partners are encouraged, though not required, and may improve the chance of being funded. Contact Fred Landa at SPO at 287-3860 or fred.landa@maine.gov for more information.

14. Regional Challenge Grants: Can expenses already incurred on the project prior to the grant award be covered under the grant?

In some cases, yes. Eligible expenses incurred prior to the grant award, but after January 1, 2005 may be applied to the local match, if approved in writing by SPO. Otherwise, only eligible expenses incurred after grant award are eligible for state reimbursement.

15. Regional Challenge Grants: In outlining the project and workplan, does the involvement of all project partners need to be described?

Yes. Articulating the role of each project partner is necessary for a more complete understanding of the proposed project, and will also help applicants flesh out the details of the proposed workplan and complementary responsibilities.

16. Please explain the requirement in the FY 2004 Implementation Grant program that allows only for the preparation of zoning

ordinances in light of the following legislative purposes and financial assistance criteria directions.

Title 30-A §4312. 2 states that the legislative purpose of the growth management act is to B - “Encourage municipalities to identify the tools and resources to effectively plan for and manage future development within their jurisdictions with a maximum of local initiative and flexibility” and C – Encourage local land use ordinances, tools and policies based on local comprehensive plans”

Title 30-A §4346 further states that in making grants pursuant to the technical and financial assistance program the State Planning Office “shall consider the need for planning in a municipality or multimunicipal region, the proximity of the municipality or multimunicipal region to the other areas that are conducting or have completed the planning process and the economic and geographic role of the municipality or multimunicipal region within a regional context. The office may consider other criteria in making grants, as long as the criteria support the goal of encouraging and facilitating the adoption and implementation of local and multimunicipal growth management programs consistent with the provisions of this article.”

The Implementation Grant Program does, in fact, allow the dedication of an Implementation Grant award toward the development of other implementation strategies of the adopted consistent plan, if a consistent zoning ordinance has already been completed or is in progress under the conditions outlined in the Eligibility section on pages 1-2 of the Implementation Grant Program Statement.

Title 30-A §4312. 2 of the Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (Title 30-A §4301 et seq.) describes the Legislative Purpose of the Act, offering general guidance that is then elucidated by provisions that follow.

The Act emphasizes the establishment of distinctions between growth and rural areas as a statutory objective in preventing development sprawl. SPO is authorized to develop criteria for its grant program in Title 30-A §4346 consistent with the purposes of the Act. Title 30-A §4326.5 is clear that implementation programs must be consistent with making rural and growth areas work, as described in §4326.3-A. Title 30-A §4314.3 requires that zoning, rate of growth and impact fee ordinances must be consistent with consistent comprehensive plans. This legal basis elevates them as priority implementation strategies to be funded with program grants ahead of other implementation strategies.